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DOWN WITH THE CARTER--REAGAN WAR DRIVE !

DRIVE

The 1975 defeat of U.S. imperialism in Indochina in part resulted from--and certainly resulted in --very strong anti-war sentiment on the part of American workers and sections of the middle class. After the defeat, the U.S. government was forced to cut back its international military actions, limit its military spending somewhat, and temporarily discontinue the draft.

Obviously, this did not mean an end to U.S. militarism. The U.S. continued to supply arms and "advisors" to hated dictators around the world (the Shah, Samoza, Pinochet, Park, etc.). The CIA continued its efforts to prop up unpopular, pro-American governments, despite hypocritical public statements to the contrary. The U.S. military continued its arms buildup just as surely, if a bit more slowly, than before. And the "poverty draft" forced millions of youth unable to find jobs into the army. But the U.S. ruling class longed for the "good old days" of unrestricted militarism. With the world capitalist crisis growing deeper, it recognized its urgent need for more military capability and more freedom of action.

The Carter and Reagan Presidencies

Carter's mission, when elected President in 1976, was to attempt to turn the anti-war tide in the U.S. It took him three years, but he finally began to have some success in late 1979. Carter's technique was to try to stir up war hysteria over a series of media-built "crises." First he "discovered" a team of Soviet military advisors who had been in Cuba for nearly twenty years. Then he exploited the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Teheran by militant Iranian students. Finally, he tried to exploit the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

To a large degree, Carter did not succeed in shifting the mood of American workers and youth in any permanent fashion. Most of the population would still be very opposed to any U.S. war. Nonetheless, there is a somewhat greater openness to right-wing and military rhetoric today, particularly on the part of conservative sections of the middle class.

Carter did succeed, however, in using the temporary wave of anti-Iranian and anti-Soviet hysteria to step up military preparations for war. Carter and the Democratic Congress greatly increased military spending. They also began draft registration. A draft itself is sure to come in the not-too-distant future. With regard to moral preparations for war, the U.S. ruling class still has a long way to go. But materially, the war drive was well under way by the time Carter left office.

The policies of the Reagan administration will be a continuation and escalation of the policies of the Carter administration. Reagan most certainly would like to undertake major military operations throughout the world. But his administration is in a much weaker position than previous ones. First of all, the U.S. economy is much weaker than it was a generation ago. The capitalists can no longer finance a major war as Johnson did in Vietnam by simply borrowing and printing up more money. They must pay for the next war by taking the money out of the pockets of workers in this country. A bigger war budget, like a renewed draft, will be harder now, because American workers are far less taken in by the capitalists and their government than they were a generation ago. Moreover, the capitalists and Reagan face a world in which not only the Soviet Union but also the U.S.'s imperialist rivals are stronger and much more resistant to U.S. schemes for world domination.

The U.S. bourgeoisie is not only preparing to intervene militarily against workers abroad but is also stepping up its attacks on workers in this country. They are attempting to impose massive unemployment, speedup, wage cuts, and cutbacks in health, education and other social services. They would also like to undertake a major union-busting drive. They want to salvage their profits and finance their wars by slashing the living standards of the American working class.

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The anti-war movement must connect the struggle against the war drive with the struggle to defend our living standards and basic rights here at home. Reagan and the capitalists are undertaking a war on two fronts. American workers must give them a war at home to protect working people in this country and to destroy their ability to intervene against working people in other countries.

No to the Draft! U.S.: Hands Off El Salvador!

The Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and the Socialist League (Democratic-Centralist) (SL(DC)) oppose all U.S. war preparations. We are committed to doing everything we can to stop the militarization now. We denounce the war drive in all our organizing. We support and help to build rallies against all aspects of the war drive--the draft, military recruiting, military spending, military and CIA

intervention, and all attempts to whip up racism, national chauvinism and war hysteria. We support registration and draft counseling to help young people avoid the draft. We are particularly concerned to make any draft counseling available to working-class and black and other minority youth, who need it most.

Right now the focal issues of the struggle against the imperialist war drive are the fight against the draft and the fight against U.S. intervention in El Salvador. This conference can be important to both fights, if we learn the key lessons of the last anti-war movement.

Anti-war activists who wish to be effective in their work must approach the struggle against the war drive from a revolutionary working-class perspective. Militarization and war cannot be eliminated permanently, except through the overthrow of world capitalism. We know this. But particular military escalations and even particular wars can be stopped, or at any rate delayed, by mass working-class mobilization. Workers' political strikes and demonstrations threaten the economy and government with complete paralysis. Rather than confront the working class and provoke civil war at home, the government may abandon its particular military objective abroad. The function of student protests should be to help bring about mass working-class mobilization.

Learning from the Old Anti-War Movement

The reinstitution of draft registration and the threat of a new draft has brought into being a new anti-war movement. This movement, at present composed mainly of students and other middle-class youth, in a sense picks up where the anti-Vietnam War movement left off. It inherits both the political acquisitions of that movement and its political weaknesses. The most important political acquisition is the understanding that a war is not right simply because the U.S. is in it, and that militarization is not right simply because the U.S. government says so. This is a starting point. But the weaknesses of the anti-Vietnam War movement must be understood, too.

One political weakness of the anti-Vietnam War movement--by no means the most important--was the inclination of its more militant wing toward individual acts of courage, rather than mass organizing. This began with the individual martyrdom of refusing ("resisting") the draft and going to jail or into exile, and ended with the individual terrorism of "trashing imperialism" and "going underground." Lacking the instinctive understanding of the need to organize that working-class youth would have had, and lacking the political consciousness to understand that only the working class could oppose the war effectively, all too many militant middle-class youth burned themselves out in frustration and frenzy over their inability to stop the war.

Our opposition to the futility of individual martyrdom does not mean that we oppose the efforts of individuals to get out of the draft. On the contrary, we want to do everything we can to help youth avoid the draft. That is why we support efforts to counsel and otherwise help people to get out of being drafted, especially working-class and black and other minority youth. But when the government actually imposes the draft, many young people are going to be forced to go. In order to organize to defeat imperialism, revolutionaries must go where the people we want to organize are. If a young activist is faced with a choice of military service or jail, we urge him or her to go into the military and organize from within. Jail might seem like the more "moral" thing to do, but it really only helps the capitalists to have their most militant and courageous opponents locked behind bars, especially during wartime.

In the army activists must do what they can to organize the other soldiers politically to end war by fighting against their main enemy at home, rather than against working people from other lands. This does not mean simply urging soldiers to disobey orders, which, especially in the initial stages of war, would simply get

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Down with Pacifism! For a Revolutionary Working-Class Orientation!

A second and much more important weakness of the anti-Vietnam War was its tendency toward pacifism and its closely related tendency toward collaboration with "liberal" capitalist politicians. Once again we are faced with a tendency for anti-war activists to turn their opposition to this U.S. war drive into an opposition to all war. This immediately will lead such activists to ally with anyone who claims to oppose this war drive, even capitalist politicians who may oppose this war drive in order better to prepare for the next war drive. Such a course would be fatal.

Imperialist wars must be opposed. But working-class revolution and wars of national liberation are an entirely different matter. How can we take a stand of "no war" when there is such oppression as there is in South Africa, El Salvador, Chile, or the U.S.? This is not to say that revolutionaries prefer violence as a way to change the social order. On the contrary, history has shown that the first shots invariably come from the side of reaction. Counter-revolutionary violence is inevitable. But this means that the working class must prepare to defend itself.

Once it becomes clear that revolutionaries must oppose imperialist wars and support wars against imperialism--both in the imperialist countries and in the neocolonies--then it is obvious that no effective anti-war movement can be built with pro-imperialist politicians and other prominent capitalist "public figures." Such people want to keep the imperialist war machine intact, while effective anti-war actions--workers' political strikes, mass demonstrations, organization of soldiers--aim at paralyzing the imperialist war machine.

A third, very important weakness of the anti-Vietnam War movement was its lack of a working-class orientation. Most anti-war activists of the 1960's and early 1970's were middle-class students appalled or outraged by the Vietnam War. They were also threatened by the draft, although many of the young men could find ways out of it. Few anti-war activists had any experience with strikes or other forms of working-class struggle. This meant that the student teach-in, demonstration or building occupation was the highest form of struggle they could even imagine, let alone organize or lead. The student protests of the 1960's and early 1970's were important in bringing workers and sections of the middle class to oppose the war. But in themselves, the protests could do little to stop it. The General Electric strike of fall 1969, the illegal postal wildcat of early 1970, the General Motors strike of fall 1970--and the collapse of discipline in the military in Indochina--scared the U.S. ruling class far more than all the student protests put together. To have made the protests much more effective, the anti-war activists needed to understand that the people they were trying to reach were not in Washington but in the factories, offices and trenches.

Among the leading supporters of Reagan's war drive will be some of the misleaders of the union movement. The late George Meany and present AFL-CIO head Lane Kirkland actively supported the Vietnam War. Kirkland now actively supports U.S. military and CIA involvement in El Salvador. The AFL-CIO has a front organization called the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). This "institute" harbors CIA agents formerly active in the "Phoenix" assassination program in South Vietnam and now active in supporting the bloody military junta in El Salvador.

To unleash the power of the American working class, the anti-war movement must demand that the unions break their ties with the CIA and AIFLD. Kirkland and the top union bureaucrats will do everything in their power to stop workers' political strikes against U.S. military adventures, because such mobilizations would threaten not only the capitalists but also the bureaucrats' own power within the labor movement. Yet workers' political strikes are critical to the struggle against war. The union misleaders must be kicked out and replaced with a new, class-struggle leadership.

Fight Racism, Sexism and Anti-Communism in the Anti-War Movement!

Closely related to the anti-Vietnam War movement's lack of a working-class orientation was its real racism and sexism. The leaders of the anti-war movement viewed the world in terms of a multiplicity of oppressed groups struggling separately for their liberation. The Vietnamese struggled for "their" liberation; blacks struggled for "their" liberation; women struggled for "their" liberation; gays struggled for "their" liberation; youth struggled for "their" liberation; some workers even struggled for "their" liberation; and so on. The "movement," which was dominated by American, white, male, straight, aging youth from the upper-middle class, "belonged" to none of these groups. It could organize or lead none of them.

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Another weakness of the anti-Vietnam War movement was its anti-Marxism. The anti-war movement called itself the "new left" to distinguish itself from the "old left" of the international communist movement. Most new leftists had heard of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky and other prominent revolutionary Marxists, but few knew anything about their ideas. This did not mean that there was anything

"new" in the views of the new left. For the most part, their theories, their organizational practices, and their tactics harked back to pre-Marxist radicalism, about which they knew as little as they did about Marxism. Attempting to ignore the experience of the international workers' movement doomed the new left to reliving ancient mistakes.

A final weakness of the anti-Vietnam War movement was its anti-Sovietism. Even most anti-imperialist activists during the 1960's and early 1970's refused to take a clear stand in defense of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba as workers' states. RWL and SL(DC) stand for unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union and the other Stalinist workers' states from imperialist attack. This is especially important since the Soviet Union has been the focus of much of the Carter/Reagan war drive.

We recite these weaknesses of the anti-Vietnam War movement not to deprecate the important contribution that movement made. Simply to oppose the Vietnam War was an important step, and many present-day revolutionaries were radicalized and received their initial political education in that movement. Rather, in order to move forward, those who wish to prevent the next war must learn from those who tried vainly for so many years to end the last one.

Build a New, Militant Anti-War Movement!

In the face of the deepening crisis of world capitalism, the imperialist countries, particularly the U.S., have begun a renewed war drive. Military spending is up. The U.S. government has begun draft registration and is preparing for a new draft. With the threat of a draft, a new student anti-war movement has begun.

The Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and the Socialist League (Democratic-Centralist) (SL(DC)) oppose the new imperialist war drive. We say, not a penny not a person for the "defense" of imperialism. We support the efforts of youth threatened with induction to avoid the draft. We support organized counseling to help youth avoid the draft, particularly for working-class and black and other minority youth.

While opposing the imperialist war drive, we are not pacifist. Working people must defend themselves against the violence of the ruling classes. Only socialist revolution can end war forever. We support the revolutionary struggles of working people in the imperialist countries and in the neocolonies. We also defend the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and the other workers' states deformed by Stalinism against imperialist attack. Revolutionaries cannot be pacifists.

While only socialist revolution can end war forever, some wars and some war preparations can be stopped by militant working-class action, such as political strikes, mass demonstrations and organization of worker-soldiers. Student anti-war activity must be seen in this light. It is very important as a way to focus the attention of workers on the need to take action to resist the war drive.

The only effective way to stop particular wars in the short run and to end war forever in the long run, is to take action that paralyzes and in the end destroys the imperialist war machine. No capitalist politicians can support effective measures to stop wars, since no capitalist politicians, even those tactically opposed to particular wars, can support measures which paralyze the imperialist war machine. In order to succeed, the new anti-war movement must direct itself toward the potentially revolutionary class, the working class, not toward "liberal" capitalist politicians.

Down with the Imperialist War Drive!

No to the Draft! U.S.: Hands Off El Salvador!

Not a Penny, Not a Person for the "Defense" of Imperialism!

For Workers' Political Strikes Against Wars and War Preparations!

Smash AFL-CIO Support for the AIFLD-CIA!

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Stop the Capitalists' War on American Workers and Workers Abroad!

For a Workers' Party to Fight for a Workers' Government!

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February 13, 1981



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